

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) A material for use as self-lubricating sliding parts, which consists of a steel comprising, by mass, from not less than 0.4 % to less than ~~4.5~~1.3 % of C (carbon), 0.1 to 3.0 % of Si, 0.1 to 3.0 % of Mn, from ~~inclusive~~ zero (inclusive) to 0.5 % of Cr, 0.05 to 3.0 % of Ni, ~~0.3-0.7~~ to 2.0 % of Al, 0.3 to 20 % in total (Mo + W + V) of at least one element selected from the group consisting of Mo, W (tungsten) and V (vanadium), and 0.05 to 3.0 % of Cu, wherein there can be observed graphite particles having an average particle size of not more than 3 μm in a section of ~~the~~a metal structure of a steel.

2. (Currently Amended) A material according to claim 1, wherein the graphite particles observed in the ~~structural~~ section of the metal structure occupy an area rate of not less than 1 % in the overall area of the ~~structural~~ section, and have an average particle size of not more than 3 μm .

3. (Currently Amended) A material according to claim 1, wherein no vanadium carbides are observed in the ~~structural~~ section of the metal structure.

4. (Previously Presented) A material according to claim 1, wherein the steel contains, by mass, 0.3 to 5.0 % in total (Mo + W) of at least one element selected from the group consisting of Mo and W, and less than 0.1 % of V.

5. (Canceled).

6. (Previously Presented) A material according to claim 1, wherein the steel contains, by mass, 1.5 to 3.0 % of Mo.

7. (Previously Presented) A material according to claim 1, wherein the steel contains, by mass, not more than 10 % of Co.

8. (Previously Presented) A material according to claim 1, wherein the steel contains, by mass, not more than 0.3 % of S (sulfur).

9. (original) A material according to claim 8, wherein the steel further contains, by mass, not more than 0.01 % Ca.

10. (Previously Presented) A material according to claim 1, wherein the steel has been subjected to nitriding treatment to use as sliding parts.

11. (Currently Amended) A wire material for use as piston rings, which consists of a steel comprising, by mass, from not less than 0.4 % to less than ~~4.5~~ 1.3 % of C (carbon), 0.1 to 3.0 % of Si, 0.1 to 3.0 % of Mn, from ~~inclusive-zero~~ (inclusive) to 0.5 % of Cr, 0.05 to 3.0 % of Ni, ~~0.3-0.7~~ to 2.0 % of Al, 0.3 to 20 % in total (Mo + W + V) of at least one element selected from the group consisting of Mo, W (tungsten) and V (vanadium), and 0.05 to 3.0 % of Cu, wherein there can be observed graphite particles having an average particle size of not more than 3 μm in a section of ~~the a~~ metal structure of the steel, and wherein sulfide inclusions observed in the ~~structural~~ section of the metal structure, being parallel to the periphery of the piston ring, are distributed such that straight lines each passing through a major axis of the respective sulfide inclusion cross one another within a cross angle of not more than 30 degrees which angle is referred to as a degree of parallelism.

12. (Currently Amended) A wire material according to claim 11, wherein graphite particles observed in ~~a~~the section of the metal structure occupy an area rate of not less than 1 % in the overall area of the ~~structural~~ section, and have an average particle size of not more than 3 μm .

13. (Previously Presented) A wire material according to claim 11, wherein the steel contains, by mass, not more than 10 % of Co.

14. (Previously Presented) A wire material according to claim 11, wherein the steel contains, by mass, not more than 0.3 % of S (sulfur).

15. (original) A wire material according to claim 14, wherein the steel further contains, by mass, not more than 0.01 % of Ca.

16. (Previously Presented) A wire material according to claim 11, wherein the steel has been subjected to nitriding treatment to use as piston rings.

17. (New) A wire material according to claim 11, wherein the steel has been forged, drawn and/or rolled from an ingot.

18. (New) A wire material according to claim 17, wherein the wire material has been annealed and subjected to quenching and tempering.

19. (New) A piston ring made from the wire material of claim 11.

20. (New) A piston ring made from the wire material of claim 17.

21. (New) A piston ring made from the wire material of claim 18.